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REPORT OF THE NEW YORK CITY VISITING COMMITTEE ON THE THREE YEARS' COURSE

A LETTER on the best length of a course of general training for nurses submitted to the Department of Public Charities by the New York City Visiting Committee of the State Charities Aid Association with recommendations based upon a study of the opinions of one hundred and forty-five superintendents of training schools or of hospitals throughout the United States and recent information from training schools in New York City, November 20, 1907.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

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THE ELECTIVE MEMBERS,

MISS HELEN C. BUTLER,

MRS. WM. B. RICE,

AND

THE CHAIRMEN OF SUB-COMMITTEES:

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105 EAST 22D STREET,
NEW YORK, November 20, 1907.

Hon. ROBERT W. HEBBERD, Commissioner,
Department of Public Charities,
Foot East 26th Street,
New York City.

MY DEAR COMMISSIONER:

In connection with the consideration in the early part of this year of the advisability of changing the length of the course of training in the training schools for nurses attached to the hospitals in the Department of Public Charities and Bellevue and Allied Hospitals, and to other hospitals in the City, such reconsideration being prompted in part by the difficulty in securing a sufficient number of desirable applicants for admission to the training schools, the New York City Visiting Committee undertook to ascertain, as far as possible, the actual experience of training schools which had changed from a two years' to a three years' course, as to the effect of this change upon the number of applicants, and also at the same time to secure the opinions of superintendents of training schools in general as to the merits of the two years', and two and a half years', and the three years' course.

The Secretary of the Committee addressed the superintendents of training schools for nurses in the United States and Canada, outside of New York City (the opinions of the officials of such schools in New York City being already known to a great extent), according to the latest available list of such schools. The subjects covered by this inquiry and a compilation of the replies, are contained in a report submitted to the New York City Visiting Committee by its Secretary, Mr. Courtenay Dinwiddie, on October 23, 1907, together with some extracts from reports of the U. S. Commissioner of Education, touching upon this subject, and the official or semi-official opinions of two organizations of nurses. We submit herewith a complete copy of Mr. Dinwiddie's report, believing that the information contained therein will be of value to you, both at present and in the future, in the further consideration of this subject.

We desire to submit the following comments and recommendations, based upon our study of the facts stated in Mr. Dinwiddie's report, and upon existing conditions in the Training Schools of the City.

I. VALUE OF OPINIONS OF TRAINING SCHOOL AND HOSPITAL
SUPERINTENDENTS

As the inquiries sent out in behalf of the Committee related primarily to questions of training school administration they were addressed to superintendents of training schools, exclusively. It was found, however, that in many cases the superintendents of training schools were also the superintendents of the hospitals to which the schools were attached. In some cases the communication was referred to the superintendent of the hospital for reply. Of the one hundred and forty-two replies received that were definite and pertinent, sixty-six were from superintendents of training schools, or of nurses; and seventy-six from superintendents of both hospitals and training schools or of hospitals alone. As to the facts concerning the present and past practices of these schools, the replies undoubtedly may be considered authoritative. As to the opinions expressed, it is to be borne in mind that the respondents speak from the point of view of extensive training school experience.

Concerning the effects of the three years' course upon the number of nurses applying, they are doubtless in a better position to express opinions of value than any other persons.

As far as the care of the sick in hospitals is concerned they are also in a position to speak from personal observation and wide experience as nurses themselves, as executives, and in many cases as instructors. Their opinions on this subject, therefore, should, in our judgment, be given very great weight, in connection with the opinions of the hospitals' physicians and surgeons.

As far as the care of the sick in their own homes by trained nurses, after graduation, is concerned, it is to be remembered that those replying speak from the experience of institutional rather than of private nursing. As to the weight that should be given these replies in considering the question of how desirable or necessary a three years' course of training is to prepare a nurse to care for patients in their own homes, under the instructions of the physicians in charge, we express no opinion, except that in comparing the proper length of training to prepare a nurse to care for patients in a hospital, with the proper length for private nursing, due consideration should be given to the increased responsibility of the nurses caring for patients in their own homes, without constant supervision and without internes or supervising nurses at hand. The adequacy of the preparation of nurses for private nursing has an important bearing upon the problems of the municipal training schools. To be trained for private nursing is the object of a large part

of the applicants and, therefore, the better and more attractive such training is the better will be the general character of the applicants.

II. VALUE OF OPINIONS OF NURSES' ORGANIZATIONS

The official resolution adopted by the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses at their last annual meeting, as quoted in the Secretary's report, bears upon only the general question of the relative merits of a three years' course as compared with a two years' course. This resolution, however, should, in our opinion, be given great weight in connection with the above opinions from individual superintendents of training schools and of hospitals, as it undoubtedly expresses the conclusions of the superintendents represented in the above society, after careful consideration of the various problems in connection with the training of nurses, although its exact application to any of the special problems arising in connection with the schools in the Department of Public Charities, requires further consideration.

The semi-official resolution of the Nurses' Associated Alumnae is likewise a somewhat general expression of opinion. It is of especial interest, however, because the opinion is based upon the experience of the members of a more representative body of nurses, who have had not only training in institutions, but presumably a wider experience also in nursing patients in their own homes. The fact that this representative body of nurses unqualifiedly endorses the three years' course, with shorter hours, and disapproves of the return to the two years' course, as a result of experience in the actual work of nursing both in hospitals and in private homes, should be given careful consideration. It is to be noted that the resolution specifically states that the three years' course should be with shorter hours.

III. REPORTS OF U. S. COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

A study of the reports of the U. S. Commissioner of Education for some years past shows that the number of pupil nurses in training schools throughout the country has been steadily increasing up to 1905 at a rate which does not appear to have been materially affected, if at all, by the general lengthening of the course from two years to three.

IV. THE SITUATION IN NEW YORK CITY

Information has been secured as to the number of applicants, the number accepted as probationers, and the number accepted as pupil nurses for eight of the largest training schools of the city.

These figures show that the number of applicants to these eight city training schools decreased in 1903 from the number in 1902; that the number then remained practically the same until a decrease occurred in 1906; that so far for 1907 there has been a decided increase *pro rata* over 1906 for the eight training schools for which the figures have been obtained, excepting the two connected with St. Luke's and the Presbyterian Hospitals, which had, however, more applicants than any of the other schools. With these exceptions the increase apparently has been least in the case of the Metropolitan Hospital Training School, which alone has no emergency service. That the number accepted as probationers so far during the year 1907 has been less *pro rata*, than for any year from 1902 to 1905, inclusive, but shows an increase over the number for 1906. That the number accepted as pupil nurses so far during the year has been greater, *pro rata*, than for any other year since 1902.

* * * * *

As a result of our study of the information from various sources referred to above, we believe that the experience of training schools generally throughout the country points to the following conclusions, bearing upon the present situation in the training schools connected with the Departments of Public Charities and Bellevue and Allied Hospitals in this city.

1. That the decrease in numbers of applicants to individual schools has been due in part to the great increase in number of training schools and hospitals throughout the country, and the consequent greater demand for pupil nurses, and in part, to the failure of the training schools to provide for shorter hours for the nurses with sufficient time free from ward work for recreation and study, and for more systematic courses of training generally, such as it was understood were to accompany the lengthening of the course from two years to three. That in eight of the largest training schools in New York City there has been a decrease in the number of those accepted as pupil nurses from 1902 to 1905, but that this number has increased since 1905, so that it has been so far during 1907 at a higher rate than for any other year since 1902.

2. That the shortening of the course of training probably would increase to some degree the number of applicants of a less desirable class. That the number of applicants of a more desirable class probably would be increased only slightly, if at all, and this increase would be more than offset by the additional numbers required because of the fact that the entire force would be changed within every two years instead of every three years.

3. That the best method of increasing the number of applicants to any particular school is to improve the character and increase the variety of service; to have as short and regular hours of ward work as are reasonable and practicable, with sufficient time free for recreation and study, and regular and ample vacations; to provide good quarters, good food and ample facilities for recreation. That these matters are of especial importance to schools having a three years' course of training.

4. That a three years' course is necessary to enable the patients in the hospitals to obtain the benefit of the nurses' services when they are more experienced, in return for the training they receive, and also to minimize the undesirable results of frequent changes of nurses from department to department and to give the force of nurses a somewhat more stable and dependable character.

5. That a two years' course of training should be allowed only in schools connected with hospitals that are too small, or whose services are of too special or limited a nature to give the nurses a thorough training in the various branches in which they should be experienced for general nursing. That if the officials of such training schools wish to graduate nurses that are properly equipped for general nursing, and that will add to the reputation of the schools, they should meet the deficiencies in their courses of training by affiliation with other schools, the total length of training to be three years.

6. That the courses of training of the various schools should be as nearly uniform as possible, especially in hospitals having the same general character of service.

7. That the affiliation of different schools to obtain a more uniform course of training is entirely practicable and satisfactory.

8. That an optional six months or third year, if in any way considered as replacing a third year of regular training, would be objectionable, for a variety of reasons, and probably very few nurses, if any, would take advantage of it, except those wishing to be trained for special work.

In view of the above conclusions the Committee respectfully submits the following recommendations:

1. That the three years' course be retained in all training schools in the Department of Public Charities which at present have such a course, with the following two provisos: *a.* That there be maintained in each school the full quota of nurses necessary to properly care for the patients, with due allowance to each nurse of sufficient time free from ward work for study, recreation and vacations. *b.* That wherever possible the facilities for the recreation and reasonable comfort of the nurses be

improved, requests for special additional funds for this purpose to be made, if required; that a full staff of instructors be maintained, with an increase if necessary, so that too much work will not devolve upon the individual instructors, and a thorough system of training may be most efficiently maintained.

2. That at all times such additional graduate nurses be employed as may be necessary to provide the full quota of nurses to carry out thoroughly the provisions of the above paragraph.

3. That to make the training as thorough and attractive as practicable the New York City Training School should retain a course of training in emergency service, such as is obtained by affiliation with Gouverneur Hospital, and the Metropolitan Hospital Training School should secure a larger experience for its nurses in emergency service, such as might be obtained by affiliation with the training school of the Cumberland Street Hospital.

4. Although this Committee believes that it would be to the ultimate advantage of the Kings County Hospital Training School to have a three years' course for the general reasons given above, it recommends, in order to obviate the objections to frequent changes in the length of the course of training and in order to afford a good basis for a comparison of the contemporaneous trial of the two courses in somewhat similar institutions, that the two years' course be retained in this training school until such a comparison can be made advantageously. In all other respects, except as to length of course, the recommendations of the Committee apply to the Kings County Hospital Training School.

In conclusion we beg to state our belief that the best remedy for any undesirable conditions that may exist in the municipal training schools is to be sought in other ways than that of shortening the length of the nurses' training from three years. We believe, however, that it is necessary to the ultimate success of a three years' course of training that as far as possible a full staff of nurses should be maintained, by the employment of graduates, if required, to carry out fully such measures as are advisable for the care of the patients and the training of the nurses with a maximum of thoroughness and efficiency, with due regard to the provision of every facility for the recreation and reasonable comfort of the nurses.

HOMER FOLKS, President.

ALEXANDER C. PROUDFIT, Chairman,

Special Committee on Nursing.

BRIEF EXTRACTS OF THE MOST IMPORTANT PARTS OF THE REPORT OF THE
SECRETARY THAT ARE NOT EMBODIED IN THE PRECEDING LETTER
TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC CHARITIES

A BRIEF STATEMENT OF THE NUMBER OF SUPERINTENDENTS OF GENERAL
SCHOOLS OR HOSPITALS FOR OR AGAINST THE THREE YEARS' COURSE

3-YEAR SCHOOLS.—“The replies from the ninety-one superintendents of general hospitals or of training schools connected with such hospitals, having three years' courses of training for nurses (which constitute a large majority of the total of the replies that were received) are overwhelmingly in favor of the three years' course as compared with the two years' course. Only six, or seven and four-tenths per cent of the eighty-one that reply definitely, state any objections to the three years' course under their present conditions, and only one is in favor of a two years' course. One is inclined to favor a two and one-half years' course. The reasons given are analyzed more fully in the body of the report.

2-YEAR SCHOOLS.—“Of the general schools or hospitals having two years' courses six are in favor of the two years' course without qualification. Eight are in favor of it under their present conditions, their replies being somewhat doubtful as to other conditions (such as being in a larger hospital) or else implying that they would favor the three years' course under such conditions. Two state definitely that they would prefer three years if they had a larger hospital or a better service, and two that they would prefer the three years' course under their present conditions.

RELATIVE VALUE OF OPINIONS.—“In comparing the different replies it should be borne in mind that the great majority of the three-year general schools, seventy-two out of eighty-nine (two do not answer) changed the length of their courses from two to three years and, therefore, have had actual experience with both courses, while none of the two-year general schools have had a three years' course. Moreover, the three-year schools, besides having the weight of numbers to strengthen the opinions of their officials (there are ninety-one three-year general schools as compared to eighteen two-year schools), are well distributed among hospitals of all sizes, and all degrees of acuteness of service, while the majority of the two-year schools (eleven out of eighteen) are in hospitals having fifty or less than fifty beds.

2½-YEAR SCHOOLS.—“Of the seven having a two and one-half years' course, one is in favor of two years ‘for an intelligent young woman’—‘properly taught.’ Three favor a three years' course if the

hospital is sufficiently large, and has a good service. The remaining three favor a two and one-half years' course, one, however, saying that the three years' course would be an advantage to the hospital. The superintendent of the only hospital of this class whose training school has shortened its course from three years is in favor of a three years' course."

NUMBER OF THOSE THAT ACTUALLY EXPERIENCE DIFFICULTY IN SECURING
PUPIL NURSES

"As to the actual difficulty experienced in securing candidates (regardless of their desirability) the facts are as follows: Of the general schools having a two years' course, from whom definite replies were received, thirty-one per cent. have difficulty, of the two and one-half year schools of the same class forty-three per cent. have difficulty, of the three-year schools, forty-five per cent."

RESOLUTIONS OF TWO ORGANIZATIONS OF NURSES

The following is a resolution adopted by the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses at their last annual meeting in Philadelphia:

"That this Society emphatically endorses the three years' course for student nurses and does protest against the movement to reduce the term to two years."

The following is an extract from a letter of the editor of THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF NURSING:

"At the tenth annual convention of the Nurses' Associated Alumnae, held at Richmond, owing to the great pressure of business on the last day, a formal discussion of the subject of the return to the two years' course, which had been planned for, was crowded out.

"After the adjournment of the convention, when this was realized, such great dissatisfaction was felt that the members were called together, on the deck of the steamer, *en route* to the Jamestown Exposition, and the following motion was proposed and was unanimously and enthusiastically passed:

"'We heartily endorse the three years' course, with shorter hours, and disapprove the return to the two years' course.'

"While this resolution was not a part of the official proceedings of the convention, the official delegates were practically all present, and the resolution represents the opinion of these representative women of the whole country, from the Atlantic to the Pacific."

TABLE FROM 1905 REPORT OF U. S. COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

Year.	Schools.	Capacity of Hospitals (beds).*	Pupil Nurses.	Graduates.
1905.....	862	145,506	19,824	5,795
1900.....	432	84,227	11,164	3,456
1895.....	131	.....	3,985	1,498
1890.....	35	.....	1,552	471
1885.....	34	.....	793	218
1880.....	15	.....	323	157

“One of the interesting deductions from the above table is that for all of the training schools included in the table the number of hospital beds under their care averaged 7.54 for each pupil nurse in 1900 and 7.34 in 1905. The increase in number of pupil nurses does not appear to have been materially affected, if at all, by the general lengthening of the course from two years to three.”

ALMSHOUSE NURSING

By L. L. DOCK

No one who was at the Richmond meeting last June will have forgotten the stirring appeal made by the Rev. Caroline Bartlett Crane for the introduction of skilled nursing into the almshouses of the country, nor the impressive paper read by Mrs. Lupinski in which she related what Michigan had done.

There was a committee appointed, as all will remember, to take up this much-needed reform. As chairman of this committee, I have had to excuse delay in taking up this work on the grounds of a belated return from France. Now, however, having had time to communicate with all my committee, and with the presidents of state societies, I beg the JOURNAL to let me use its pages that an outline of the proposed work may reach its many readers at one moment with an extensiveness not possible to attain by the slow method of correspondence. As the body of women whom Mrs. Crane hopes to interest in the almshouses and with whom we are prepared to work in coöperation—the National Federation of Women’s Clubs—does not meet until June of this year (1908) we have time to think and plan the best preliminary steps to take. Conjecturing, as I think we reasonably may, that if they take up the line of work proposed by Mrs. Crane, they will do so on state lines, we have thought it well to begin by asking for a committee to be

*In hospitals for the insane, epileptic and feeble-minded the number of inmates is used.